

History

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The Boulder Valley was first the home of Indians, primarily the Southern Arapaho tribe who maintained a village near Haystack Mountain. Utes, Cheyennes, Comanches, and Sioux were occasional visitors to the area.

Gold seekers established the first non-native settlement in Boulder County on October 17, 1858 at Red Rocks near the entrance to Boulder Canyon. Less than a year later, on February 10, 1859, the Boulder City Town Company was organized by A.A. Brookfield, the first president, and 56 shareholders. Four thousand forty-four lots were laid out at a purchase price of \$1,000 each, a price that was later lowered in order to attract more residents.

Part of the Nebraska Territory until February 28, 1861, when the Territory of Colorado was created by the U.S. Congress, Boulder City grew slowly. It developed as a supply base for miners going into the mountains in search of gold and silver. Boulder City residents provided these miners with equipment, agricultural products, housing and transport services, and gambling and drinking establishments.

Competition among Boulder County settlements for new residents and businesses was intense. As a mining supply town, Boulder residents were more settled than in the mining camps. Economic stability was a necessity and residents encouraged the establishment of railroad service, hospital and school buildings, and a stable town government.

Boulder's first schoolhouse was built in 1860 at the southwest corner of Walnut and 15th Street, the first in the territory. Also in 1860 a group of Boulder residents began lobbying to have the University of Colorado located in Boulder. By 1874 Boulder had won the designation, secured a donated 44.9 acre site and raised \$15,000 to match a similar grant by the state legislature. Construction of Old Main signaled the opening of the University, with classrooms, auditorium, office and the President's living quarters all located there.

Transportation was improved in 1873 with railroad service coming to Boulder. Gradually tracks were laid to provide service to Golden and Denver and to the mining camps to the west. In 1890 the railroad depot was constructed on Water Street (now Canyon Boulevard) and 14th Street.

City government was formalized on Saturday, November 4, 1871 when the town of Boulder was incorporated. The first mayor, Jacob Ellison, was elected for a two month term in 1878.

By 1880 Boulder's population had passed the 3,000 mark, which was the minimum required by state statutes for the incorporation of a city of the second class. This step was taken on April 3, 1882, and that month a new town hall was completed in time for the first meeting of the council of the newly formed city government. Designation of Boulder as the county seat occurred in 1867 and led to the construction of the first courthouse at its present site in 1883. It burned to the ground in 1932 and was replaced by the current courthouse in 1934.

Amenities and health services were developed, even in periods of little growth. The first Post Office was established in 1860; the telegraph became available in 1874; a hospital was built in 1873; a water system was installed in 1874; and the first bank was built in 1874.

The initial residential area was located in what is now downtown and in some parts of Goss/Grove, Whittier and Mapleton Hill neighborhoods. As commercial expansion took over downtown housing, these neighborhoods surrounding downtown remained primarily residential areas. At the turn of the century growth of the University led to the development of parts of University Hill. One mark of elegance for residents were flagstone sidewalks, first installed during the 1880's.

The first private school in Boulder, Mount St. Gertrude Academy, was opened in 1892. Boulder, by then accessible to visitors by railroad, was known as a community with a prosperous economy, a comprehensive educational system, and well maintained residential neighborhoods. It was no wonder that the railroad recommended Boulder as a site for a Chautauqua in 1897. Boulder residents passed a bond issue to buy the land, and the now familiar Chautauqua auditorium was built.

By 1905 the economy was faltering and Boulder counted heavily on tourism to boost its fortunes; however, Boulder had no first class hotel to attract summer visitors and group meetings. By 1906 a subscription drive had raised money to begin construction. The first event at the new hotel was a reception for Boulderites, held on December 30, 1908, and the Hotel Boulderado opened to the public for business on January 1, 1909.

Tourism continued to dominate the Boulder economy for the next forty years. Each summer shopkeepers, transport firms, and lodging managers eagerly awaited the influx of Chautauqua residents, primarily from Texas, and other visitors. By World War II, when tourism declined, the University unknowingly provided another opportunity for growth. With the location of the U.S. Navy's Japanese language school at CU, young men and women from around the country became acquainted with the City and liked it.

Following World War II, many of these trainees returned as students, professional and businesspeople, joining veterans attending the University on the G.I. bill. Boulder's population had not increased significantly since the 1920's. The 1920 census showed 11,006 residents while the 1940 census count was 12,958. After the first influx of new residents in the late 1940's the count soared to 20,000 in 1950.

New residents meant both new opportunities and new challenges. Although jobs were needed, townspeople wanted to preserve the beautiful natural setting and amenities developed over the years. By 1950 Boulder leaders were actively recruiting new "clean" industry and improved transportation, securing a new highway, the Boulder-Denver Turnpike, and the National Bureau of Standards in 1952. Other research and development industries soon followed.

The housing shortage and need for additional business and public buildings attracted young and talented architects. New subdivisions were planned, including the Highland Park-Martin Acres neighborhood located on the historic Martin Farm, and the North Boulder developments from Balsam north, originally part of the Tyler Farm. New neighborhoods brought the City's first two shopping centers, North Broadway and Basemar.

With the completed turnpike to downtown Denver, Boulder continued to expand. From 1950-1972 the population grew from 20,000 to 72,000. Boulder comprises 25.37 square miles.

With the purchase of thousands of acres of open space beginning in 1967, the adoption of the Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan in 1970, passage of the building height restriction ordinance in 1972, and the residential growth management ordinance in 1977, Boulder began a period of infill and re-use of its past architectural development which continues to present. The Historic Preservation Code was passed in September, 1974. The ordinance is instrumental in preserving significant portions of our past while encouraging the rehabilitation of historic buildings.

(Sources: Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board and "Municipal History of Boulder" at the Carnegie Library)

Carnegie historical photos | Watershed history
Open Space History | City Council, 1966 to present
Downtown and Univ. Hill historical photos | Downtown and Pearl Street Mall
Pearl Street Mall grand opening, 1977 | Columbia Cemetery